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AUTHOR Kendall, Robert
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ABSTRACT

Much has been written about public relations as either a science or an art. Public relations is a phenomenon within society and has existed long before the name was first applied to the work of building relationships between social groups. Public relations deals with the very core of human experience: relationships. If art may be understood as an interpretation of the human experience, then the public relations function is an art because it interprets the culture through the instrument of myth. The degree of success that the public relations practitioner enjoys or which the profession itself enjoys in its effort to interpret culture through myth becomes the basis for constructive criticism. Macro-myth is a process of social self-identification, which has seven stages or characteristics, including an experience shared by a group of people, the institutionalization of the event, and a belief system that formalizes elements associated with the event into religious institutions. The myth experience thus affirms for the socially cohesive group a self-understanding, and because of this it is myth that offers the key to the critical evaluation of the public relations function. (DF)

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PUBLIC RELATIONS AS ART: A PROLOG TO CRITICISM

by

Robert Kendall, Ph.D., APR
University of Florida

A paper submitted to Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Public Relations Division in Convention, Memphis, Tennessee, August 3-6, 1985

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PUBLIC RELATIONS AS ART: A PROLOG TO CRITICISM

Much has been written about public relations as either a science or as an art. Edward L. Bernays attacks the merger of advertising agencies and public relations firms on the premise that public relations as an art possesses a social responsibility which distinguishes it from advertising which lacks any responsibility except to profit.

> When the profession of public relations was first outlined in my book, Crystallizing Public Opinion, published by Bone and Liveright, Inc. in 1923, it was envisioned as other professions functioned: that is as an art applied to a science, in this case social science, and in which the primary motivation was the public interest and not pecuniary motivation.[1]

Whatever the relationship between public relations and art or science, most definitions agree that public relations involves a special relationship with society. Scott Cutlip and Allan Center in Effective Public Relations (5th ed.) include as the heart of their definition of the field ". . .socially responsible performance. . .." Harold Burson has said that "corporations are no longer simply an economic entity but a social entity, and that is the making of public relations."[2] Public relations is a phenomenon within society and has existed long before the name was first applied to the work of building relationships between social groups.

But what is the relationship between building social relationships and art? Public relations deals with the very core of human experience: relationships. If art may be understood as an interpretation of the human experience, then

public relations may qualify as an art because of its charge to interpret the human experience of organizational life. By interpreting to employees and to the general public how organized human activity carries out its mission--and does so in the public interest--the public relations practitioner is engaging in an artistic enterprise. Public relations is an art at the point it interprets the human experience of organizational life--whether a General Motors or a General Hospital--to the society in which it operates.

In a perceptive analysis of Alain Resnais' classic film "Hiroshima, Mon Amour," Martin J. Medhurst notes, "Art, for Resnais, is the human being's attempt to capture and express existence and experience." The artist, working in whatever medium--painting in oils, sculpting in stone, crafting words, producing cinema, or dare we say building public relationships--fulfills the artist's function by interpreting the experience of human existence to the very people who are living through the experience of "existing" as human beings. Medhurst wrestles with a central problem of the artist:

> Art codifys[sic]mankind's existence and thereby helps it to remember and feel. Soon, however, because of the limitations of the human mind, it comes to function as a propositional statement, a metaphysical statement of the way things are, divorced from the sentiment of creation and unresponsive to the flow of time. Art proclaims reality, but in the very proclaiming falsifies it. [3]

Art by its very embodying of human experience distorts it--in a sense "lies"--but the partial capturing of a moment in an ongoing life helps us to see the larger truth.

Pablo Picasso, whom we may presume gained some insight into the meaning of art said, "Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth."[4] Perhaps public relations shouldn't flirt with "lies" since so many people are only too ready

to believe that lying and public relations have some inherent affinity. But there is more at stake here than an invitation to a "cheap shot."

In reducing the human experience to form, the artist distorts the literal truth of that experience which is dynamic, moving and living. The artist does so in order to provide an understanding of the experience for those both inside and outside of that very experience. Whether we are participants in a mountain climbing expedition, later captured in an oil painting or participants in another annual meeting of a corporate family depicted in a feature story in the company publication, most people are compelled to some further understanding of the human experience by wintessing the artistic effort.

Indeed, if we are participants in a significant experience we want to preserve the moment by taking home a souvenir of the experience. Medhurst puts it this way:

> Humans cannot give meaning or expression to their existence without 'saving the appearances' of the moment, be it in a cave painting, book, song, or film. But no sooner has the appearance been saved and recorded than humans forget that it is an appearance and start to act as though it is reality, as though the thing symbolized is the thing itself.[5]

In some artistic creations we generally appreciate the form for its aesthetic beauty without paying attention to the distortion of reality. Rembrandt, da Vinci, Aeschylus and Shakespeare are not regarded as liers. But in some other art forms we do tend to see the lie more than we see the truth. It is perhaps significant that the term for one of the more profound human art forms--myth--has become, in its popular meaning at least, a synonym for falsehood.

To speak of myth calls to mind visions of gods and goddesses from the dim past. The connotation of myth as falsehood in the modern mind suggests that the mythic legends and stories of the past have only one value to modern minds--a reminder that they are the anthesis to modern enlightened thinking.

MYTH IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE

The most elementary level of human experience is the phenomena within which each of us lives. The environment of the physical world in all its aspects including human interactions is the substance of the human experience to which we all must give meaning. Making sense of our physical and social surroundings is the ultimate challenge of being human. It is this task which the artist helps us perform. By capturing a fleeting moment of human experience and expressing it in an art form the artist helps us see the truth--helps interpret our experience.

Art uses many different media to interpret the human experience: from cave painting, to oil on canvas, to sculpture, to music, to dance, to literature, to film and many others. The basic purpose of art, however, is to interpret phenomena. By art we mean a broader spectrum of human activity than the so called "fine arts" but we include all the human artifices.

Phenomena represent a basic influence on human thought and opinion. In its most primitive manifestation before science expanded our understanding, phenomena were those uncommon events which society tended to regard with awe and therefore to attribute mythical significance. Such phenomena range from the minimally awe inspiring event retold throughout the region of its occurence to the momentcus event that captures the attention of the entire nation or even the entire world.

For example, a drouth or a volcanic eruption often has such an impact on people that a scientific explanation is seldom the only interpretation of the event. Some will see the event as the judgment of God, others will see it as punishment for some real or imagined failing, others will see it as a warning that space exploration is threatening the earth or that the Soviet Union has perfected a new and mysterious weapon. The fact that such interpretations fail to win wide consensus doesn't detract from the conviction of those who see it that way.

Of the spectrum of influences on public opinion, the most profound aspects have received the least attention. While the literature examines economic, family, social strata, education, personality, etc. as influences on public opinion there is little mention of such pervasive forces as the social interpretation of phenomena, myth, religion, beliefs and values.

We suggest that certain basic influences have a profound effect on public opinion and that these begin with the perception of objective reality, the social interpretation of reality, myth and other related forces. The philosophic consensus--within society--of what the nature of reality is determines how society adapts to the enviornment.

For example, because Western society believes or subscribes to the Aristotlean philosophy that the reality which humans experience is susceptible to manipulation and change for human advantage--a philosophy foreign to much of the third world, by the way--the entire process of Western industrialization was possible. Societies like Iran which reject the philosophical legitimacy of manipulating objective reality and assert that "revealed truth" alone must dictate human activity in man's relationship to the human physical environment inculcates in their people quite distinctive attitudes and opinions from our Western point of view. The philosophic interpretation of "reality" thus forms the foundation upon which society bases its attitudes and opinions. Nor does a sophisticated understanding of reality remove the power of mythic interpretations over collective behavior.

Philosophical interpretations of reality form the basis of myth, religion, and art, and as such contribute a foundation to beliefs, attitudes, opinions and behavior within a society. An event of limited or even trivial social significance--lightening striking a newly erected flag pole, a tornado destroying one house and leaving six neighboring structures unscathed--may take on fleeting

mythical interpretations even among normally sophisticated people.

Such phenomena exert an influence on public opinion and while these various interpretations may never achieve wide consensus, some individuals are powerfully influenced by these minority interpretations. Indeed more seemingly plausible if not irrational interpretations may momentarily sway large numbers of people. The Army-McCarthy Hearings era of fear lacked concrete proof of communist subversion but shaped an impressive popular consensus--even if only temporary. Such is an indication of the power of myth, even in contemporary life.

MYTH AS A FUNDAMENTAL ART FORM

Serious scholars have looked at the mythic record of the past as a language capable of revealing a past lost to historic investigation, a language different from the characteristic scientific precision of the modern age. Mythic language is a fundamental art form in which important truths--the cherished meanings of a people--are couched. Myth is a form that reveals much about society and the larger culture of which it is a part. In fact, if mythic arts of the past can reveal so much about an ancient people, perhaps myth as an art form can reveal much about modern cultures that may be hidden to other methods of investigation.

Anthropologists look at myth as a kind of cultural cement. Myth is an art form by which cultures define themselves. Like other art forms it contributes to understanding the human condition, but it does so in a uniquely profound sense. Myth provides the self understanding by which members of a culture maintain their cultural identity.

Kathleen M. Sands offers an excellent example of this art form in her article "The Singing Tree: Dynamics of a Yaqui Myth" recounted as the Yaqui tell it themselves. Like many other American Indian tribes threatened with extinction by an overwhelming white man's culture, the Yaqui maintained their

cultural identity by their tribal myth:

> Indian peoples countered the conquest of their lands with 'an outward acceptance' of white ways 'beneath which they kept their old rituals and idea systems alive by a sort of semi-secret passive resistance.' The telling of origin myths and other tribal stories was one form of resistance to white intrusion, perhaps the critical mode of preventing extinction of tribal identity..... .over a four hundred hear period the Yaquis reveal remarkable versatility and tenacity in sustaining an identifiable culture. . . .Perhaps it is the capacity to modify and recreate the central mythos of their identity that has sustained them. That mythos rests on a single story that has been re-imagined and retold literally thousands of times, personalized, transformed, but not violated or abandoned.[6]

The essential elements of the Yaqui myth are so pertinent an example of a culture forming myth and summarized so well that it is best left told in Sands own words:

> There were people in existence from whom the Yaquis descended, called the Surem, and in the middle of their land was a tree without branches that made a singing sound which not even the wise old men of the tribe could interpret. Finally the people went to the wilderness to a woman who received her power from the sea, to ask her to translate the message of the tree. She came and listened for a long time and then began to tell the people that a god had made the earth for human beings, that he made the earth, plants, animals, and men to dwell upon the land and that many strange things would happen to them. The woman told them that the tree said that a god would come to them to baptize them and that those who were baptized would eventually die. There were many other prophecies concerning the future. . .. The message caused much distress among the listeners and a conflict ensued, which divided the Surem into those who wanted to accept baptism and those who did not. Those who refused became enchanted and went into the wilderness where they still dwell today. . .. Those who accepted the message of the Singing Tree became large and human, the Yaqui people.[7]

The essential character of a culture is reflected and sustained in the myths by which that culture maintains itself. This mythic function underlies cultural diversity and may help to understand cultural disparity as pronounced as the Western or European and the Near Eastern.

Joseph Campbell in his monumental study of mythology, The Masks of God describes in Occidental Mythology the roots of cultural difference between Europe and the Near East. ". . .the earliest European mythological records of importance date from the paleolithic caves of c. 7,500-3.500 B.C.(p. 34)." Values of the European Renaissance which inspired learning, science and industry for western society differ at a rudimentary level from Near Eastern values of religious authority and submissive acceptance. Values of both Europe and the Near East grew from the deepseated cultural heritage of the two regions, he explains:

> In the European spirit the structuring force lives on of the long building of its races to the activities of the hunt, and therewith the virtues of individual judgment and independent excellence; while, in contrast, in the younger, yet culturally far more complex Near East the virtues of group living and submission to authority have been the ideals bred into the individual--who in such a world, is actually no individual at all, in the European sense, but the constituent of a group.[8]

It is this examination of the roots of myth that promises valuable insights--not only for other times and places but for our own culture as well. Myth as an art form fulfills the function of sustaining cultural identity whether in the fashion of the European solitary huntsman--which American culture has inherited so pervasively--or in the fashion of the Near Eastern individual sacrificing for the group--of which American culture also shares through the adoption of Near Eastern Hebrew and Christian myths.

HOW THE PUBLIC RELATIONS ART EMPLOYS MYTH

It is in the sense of retelling the culture sustaining myth that public relations may best be understood as art. By interpreting for individual participants in a culture what that cultural participation means public relations contributes to an understanding of the human condition in the best tradition of the literary arts.

The public relations function employed to this end contributes profoundly to the interpretation of a culture's self understanding. The public relations practitioner--like other artists in theatre, literature or the graphic arts--must be a serious student of his culture. He must imbue himself with his culture, or as T. S. Eliot put it, must "steep himself in the gathered light" of his cultural tradition.[10] The culture supplies the grist for the artist's mill as well as for the public relations practitioner's mill. Eliot believed cultural immersion essential for the artist to fulfill the challenge of the artist's role. The challenge the artist faces--the very function of the artist--is the interpretation of the human experience as it is lived out in the cultural tradition. It is here that the public relations practitioner shares the function of the artist; he too must imbue himself in the gathered light of his cultural tradition in order to interpret that human experience as it is lived among the various constituent publics of the organization being represented.

The public relations practitioner thus interprets to employees what it means to be a part of the corporate team within the larger framework of the cultural tradition at large, interpret to shareholders the meaning of owning equity in an economic enterprise, interpret to the community what it means to be joint citizens--corporation and individual together-- in a common city, state and nation. The public relations practioner helps the organization understand itself and translates that understanding to constituents both inside and outside the organization, and it is an understanding "steeped in the gathered light" of the culture which individual and corporation share.

The interpretation which the practitioner thus carries out may be expressed in the full range of public relations practice: planning and executing events in such a way as to relate the organization to its cultural heritage, advocating the socially responsible role of the organization inside and outside

the organization, writing feature stories, brochure copy, news stories to emphasize those cultural values cherished by both the organization and by society.

MYTH AS THE BASIS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS CRITICISM

If the reader can accept the argument of this essay to this point,that the public relations function is an art because it interprets the culture through the instrument of myth, the next argument is that the degree of success which the public relations practitioner enjoys--or which the profession itself enjoys--in its effort to interpret culture through myth becomes the basis for constructive criticism. Because myth is the art form by which a culture comes to understand itself the public relations profession can measure its effectiveness in terms of its facility with its cultural mythos.

Myth can be the basis for criticism of public relations for the same reasons and in the same way as it is for art criticism or literary criticism. Public relations as with the full range of the arts is both rooted in its society and culture and is responsible to it. The social responsiblity of public relations assumes a more profound meaning in this context. Social responsibility is not simply a conforming to what society expects at the moment but is an expression of a profound responsibility to the culture in the same sense that art is such a reflection of cultural selfunderstanding. This larger social responsibility thus serves as the standard for criticism of the public relations function as an art.

Criticism as it is applied to literature or the arts attempts to evaluate and guide the socially responsible development of the field of artistic endeavor. As applied to the practice of public relations, criticism would

also propose to evaluate and guide by establishing criteria for such guidance. The criticism of public relations practice can draw from other fields of criticism by adapting criteria in use elsewhere.

Joan Shelley Rubin offers a most compelling argument based on the writings of the literary critic Constance Rourke to the end that myth serves just such a basic criterion for criticism. Rubin represents Rourke as proposing that myth is the foundation of criticism within culture:[11]

> Rourke typified the critic as myth-maker. . .many writers of the 1930's suffering from a keen sense of social disintegration, turned to myth as a way of restoring order to what seemed an irrational world. . .. 'It was an age which consciously sought new heroes, new symbols, even new myths as a means of coping with what many perceived as the exposure of[the failure of] the American way of life'. . .they transformed the past into 'precisely the sort of compelling political myth that could comfort the populace in an age of chaos and uncertainty(Joan Shelley Rubin, "Constance Rourke In Context: The Uses of Myth" American Quarterly 28(Winter 1976): 575-588) p. 587).citing: Warren Susman, ed., Culture and Commitment, 1925-1945 (New York: George Braziller, 1973), p. 19, and Richard H. Pell, Radical Visions and American Dreams (New York: Harper and Row, 1973)p. 315.

If literary criticism needs guidance in troubled times, public relations practice is no less in need of a steadying hand. If mythology can be the foundation of literary criticism, perhaps an understanding of the mythic heritage of our own culture can contribute to the continuing health of the practice of public relations. While there is some question as to whether American culture possesses a mythology, Rourke went to some length to show that it does. Two students of myth, Giambattista Vico and J. H. Herder emphasized the relationship between popular tradition and the growth of culture. Rubin notes that "Herder's similar idea that myth formed the basis for any national culture strengthened Rourke's belief that the fine arts required the existence of a native mythology.[12]

DEFINING MYTH

Considerable controversy surrounds the interest in mythology among American Studies scholars. Most of these efforts define such terms as myth, legend, ritual and related concepts in such a way as to support the particular argument being put forth by the writer. One such writer asserts that myth grows out of ritual. It seems to me that the reverse may be more often true depending on ones definition of myth. (I will propose a definition of both in a context that may shed some light on the relationship shortly.) "The view of myth as originating in primitive ritual allowed Rourke to make an additional, important claim: that America was a nascent culture. Her statement in American Humor attests as much, indeed "Far from having no childhood. . .we are a young people, with a riotous imagination and. . . all peoples in their youth invent mythologies."[13]

Whatever the nature and relationship of myth, legend, and ritual, there is considerable evidence that there is indeed a rich tradition in American experience which might be described in mythic terms. Henry Nash Smith in the preface of his Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth declares that what is involved is "an intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image" and that it is a "collective representation:"

> The terms 'myth' and 'symbol' occur so often in the following pages that the reader deserves some warning about them. I use the words to designate larger or smaller units of the same kind of thing, namely an intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image. The myth and symbols with which I deal have the further characteristic of being collective representations rather than the work of a single mind. I do not mean to raise the question whether such products of the imagination accurately reflect empirical fact. They exist on a different plane. But as I have tried to show, they sometimes exert a decided influence on practical affairs.[14]

In his exploration of Hitler's Mein Kampf, Michael McGuire presents a rather comprehensive deliniation of myth. "Myth is a mode of assertive writing," he claims, and fits the term to his purpose, "characterized by a superhuman protagonist, narrated by an oracular persona, possessing a unique tense or concept of time, which is offered as a model of reality."

"This definition of myth, he says in a note, tells something about how myth means. For although myth makes arguments addressed directly to reality, and so performs the function of 'charting' reality, myth cannot be understood literally, but has 'dream' dimensions as Kenneth Burke has discussed them. A myth does not depend upon literal or referential accuracy for its successful functioning because its meaning is its story as a model,"which meaning is above the level of, for example, diction." [15]

Myths usually resolve contradictions of some sort or address important questions which a culture is asking about itself. Usually the mythic hero, although superior in kind to humans, is a real person in basis--Faust, Jesus, Hercules--whose story is told as a model of social behavior. Besides being grounded in reality through the protagonist, myths generally refer to events alleged to have taken place in the real historical past; but the myth has rhetorical value because it claims to be a valid model for the present and future. It is in the sense of myth as model that a sense of double structure or double tense inheres. "A myth often has several text renderings, as Faust was treated in the Medieval chapbooks, by Marlowe, by Goethe, by Mann, even in operas by Berlioz, Busoni, and Gunod. The myth itself is exhausted by none of these texts, but is something greater than and prior to them all. This deep structure of myth is what its numerous versions seek to repeat into clarity." [16]

A myth system will be found implicit in all sorts of manifestations of society: its literature, its art, its life styles, its economic system, its educational processes, its legal system. Each of these social manifestations gives meaning to individuals and organizations within society.

The importance of myth in the interpretation of individual and organizaitonal roles in society is particularly true from the perspective of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Amos Wilder, in his The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric (N.Y.: Harper, 1946) characterizes myth as "total world representation." He describes both Jewish and Christian religions as "mythoclastic" by which both rejected older pagan myths and replaced them with renewed myths capable of communicating new truths. He asserts the universality of myth:

> We need to be reminded that in all cultures men live by images. The meaning of things, the coherence of the world, its continuities, values and goals, all these are established for the multitudes and for societies of men by this or that world-picture or mythos, with its associated emblems, archetypes, paradigms, fables heroes, cults. Man's very being is affective and imaginative, and his powers of survival and creation are nourished by dynamic impulses which mediate themselves to him through inherited and ever renewed dramatizations which define his world. Reason is implicit and diffused in his mythos and even when it orders itself as a conscious critical instrument it draws its vitality from the faith impulse associated with the myth-making faculty. [17]

Myth gives a society and its larger culture the ideas on which it operates by using myth to interpret what individuals and organizations may expect of themselves.

Myth may have the very practical application of helping to answer questions about the important influences and processes in contemporary life. Jean Ward, a teacher of mass communication and society, pleads for answers to such questions as "How does mass communication relate to the history of ideas and to the climate of opinion? What is the relationship of mass communication to the rise and currency of particular ideas that dominated at various points in our past? Or ideas that were raised and lost?" She continues to address

the issue by suggesting that myth may be a more potent answer than its recent critics imagine:

> While the myth and symbol approach to American culture produced stimulating, provocative and even elegant works, it came under intense criticism. Tate has offered a rationale for the myth and symbol approach that relates it to the structuralism of Levi-Strauss and the linguistic studies of [Noam] Chomsky and, in effect, has argued that the myth and symbol are even better constructs than the people who used them knew they were. [18]

As a most pervasive tool for inducting the new born and the newly arrived into the society and its culture few other instruments of culturization approach the power of myth to persuade and assimmilate.

George N. Gordon describes his book Persuasion as a "book of mythology, because, as we shall shortly confirm, myths and symbols are among the most ubiquitous vehicles of persuasion." He means that myths convey those orientations peculiar to a culture by which its people identify themselves with that heritage. "Myths are formulated in all cultures," he continues, "especially and including our own." They may or may not refer to real events and/or real people, past or present. "They universally reflect a form of cultural consensus beyond 'common wisdom' and constitute the milieu for many perceptions we receive of the world around us." [19]

Anthropologist Claude Levi- Strauss explains the character of myth but cautions that it should not be confused with language. "There is a very good reason why myth cannot simply be treated as language if its scientific problems are to be solved; myth is language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech." [20] Which is to say that myth is that special kind of language by which societies communicate their essential nature not only to others but also to themselves.

While the writers cited to this point use the term myth with some unanimity, it will be clear on close examination that there is a good deal of diversity of meaning stated or implied. G. S. Kirk in his The Nature of Greek Myth (New York:The Overlook Press, 1975) dispairs of writers in the field ever reaching a consensus in a definition of myth. "Myths are a vague and uncertain category, and one man's myth is another man's legend, or saga, or folktale, or oral tradition." [21] Indeed the term myth may be beyond a precise definition. Without attempting to solve this confusion of meaning, I propose to use the term in a specific sense and to indicate that specific meaning by the use of a prefix qualifier.

There is no term which more precisely defines what I here discuss and I am using the term in a specific and limited sense. I will use the term "macro-myth" to refer to those myths which in spite of variations have a central core of meaning which provides a people with that existential self-interpretation by which a culture identifies itself.

Macro-myth as we will define it is a process of social self-identification. As such, myth infuses the psychological processes of a society, its values, beliefs, attitudes, opinions and public opinion. Social self-identification is the selfconscious personality of a people within a society; it is akin to the self awareness so important to the individual personality which is expressed in self confidence and constructive living.

MACRO-MYTH IS THE PERSONALITY OF A CULTURE

Macro-myth as we are here defining it is a social process consisting of seven stages. Not all of the stages are necessarily obvious in every macro-myth, or at least not all stages are now observable from the study of ancient macro-myths. These seven characteristics may be observed or inferred in varying degrees.

1. An experience shared by a group of people is the beginning of the macro-mythic process. The experience is momentous, spectacular or otherwise socially significant. The Singing Tree of the Yaquis, the Exodus of the Hebrew people or the frontier for the American people are examples. The experience must be an event of great portent according to the perceptions of the group sharing the experience. The experience leads to the next stage:

2. An existential interpretation of the experience enables the group to come to an understanding of itself through meaning attributed to the event. The group derives a basic self-interpretation from the event which tells members of the group what it means to be a part of the group. The interpretation is entirely subjective and tends to be what the group wants to believe about itself. In the Biblical account of the Exodus, the Egyptian's interpretation which the Bible recounts, is diametrically opposed to the Hebrew account of what happened. It is this social self-interpretation which is attributed to an event that gives myth its power. The interpretation leads to the next stage:

3. The institutionalization of the event establishes its meaning in a formal expression. The event is recalled at significant times in the life of the group, often with elaboration and embellishment. The reenactment of the event becomes the celebration of the group's identity, which sets it apart from all other peoples and which also provides cohesiveness to keep the group together. The idealization of the event endows it with a special power to command the attention and conformity of the dissident within the group and thereby endorses the values emanating from the idealized event.

4. Social and ethical values emanate from and are attributed to the event. Behavior patterns, practices and outlooks that were a part of the experience of the event take on the authority of and are legitimized by the event. The affirmation of things associated with the event leads to the incorporation of

those values, behaviors, practices and talismans into a formal system or systems of belief:

5. A belief system emanates which formalizes elements associated with the event into religious institutions which establish and formalize the recounting, the celebrating and the interpreting of the event. A belief system, within which there may be various organized religious expressions, further codify and legitimize the processes for commemorating the event. Variations in interpretation or in celebration procedures may give rise to a diversity of groups or organizations each of which advocates and promotes its own particular variation. Both the belief system as a whole and the religious organizations within it develop doctrines, as official interpretations of the event, and rituals, as official procedures for celebrating the event. The belief system represents the general consensus of the group with doctrines and rituals reflecting the consensus; religious organizations reflect the variations on the wider consensus.

6. Doctrine and ritual affirm the "correct" way to believe and celebrate the event and to properly interpret the event to society. Doctrine incorporates the official way to teach what the event means. Such doctrinal "theology" provides the rationale which overcomes and resolves questions about the meaning of the event which arrise from rational reflection. Ritual reflects the ways society reenacts, dramatizes and otherwise celebrates the event. Doctrine and ritual go hand in hand as society through its religious leaders determine the proper way to confirm and conserve the event in the life of the group.

7. The credibility of the myth may fade in spite of the best efforts of doctrine formulators and ritual guardians to insure the viability of the event by adapting it to changing conditions. When doctrine is no longer able to rationalize and justify the mythic event and when the ritual can no longer be accommodated to a believable doctrine, the myth looses credibility and disappears or is replaced.

CONCLUSION

The myth experience thus affirms for the socially cohesive group--whether it is a nation, a corporation, or a nonprofit--a selfunderstanding which also provides social values and ethical norms, the beliefs that unite members and the reasons and rituals by which the group celebrates what it holds in common. It is because myth is the very source of an organization's selfunderstanding--the meaning a group gives to its existence or the group's philosophy and mission--that myth offers the key to the critical evaluation of the public relations function.

Because public relations is an art which expresses for members of an organization what it means to be part of that organization and intreprets that organization's role in the larger culture, the criticism of the public relations function needs to proceed based on the nature of this art--that is on myth as the form which the public relations art assumes.

Public relations criticism at its most rudimentary level weighs the organization's mythology, that is, the critic evaluates whether public relations efforts adequately interpret the existence of an organization to itself and to its various publics. This anthropological approach to the criticism of public relations necessarily emphasizes the ultimate relationship between an organization and its publics. The self interpretation which public relations contributes to an organization and the understanding of that interpretation which public relations provides to the various publics is after all what public relations is all about.

This organizational selfinterpretation is, moreover, the central function of management: the shaping of the corporate philosophy and mission. The claim of public relations to participating in the management function rests on this organizational selfinterpretation role. Public relations criticism, thus, evaluates whether public relations fulfills this role.

It was Theodore Vail, as the architect of public relations and later as the chief executive officer of the Bell System, who conceived the mission and philosophy for A.T.& T. that remained unchanged for 75 years. His vision of "one system, universal service" was the existential interpretation he gave to a struggling young company that enabled it to become the A.T.& T. of today.[22]

The six elements of mythology discussed here provide a more detailed framework for public relations criticism than presently available because they break the mythic function into its various segments. This list suggests the questions the public relations critic might ask in an analysis of a particular public relations effort:

1. Does the public relations effort reflect an understanding of the organizationa's colleetive experience? Do public relations activities incorporate a sound understanding of the organization's past and its present culture?

2. Does the public relations activity express an adequate understanding of the organization's existence--its self interpretation within and responsiblity to society at large.

3. Does the public relations program enhance the organization as an "institution" by its use of the organization's selfinterpretation to explain itself as an entity within society.

4. Does the public relations effort uphold the values and ethical norms that have grown out of the organization's selfinterpretation as an entity within society.

5. Does the public relations program reflect and contribute to the belief system that evolves from the organization's selfinterpretation and is it in keeping with the organization's role within the larger society?

6. Does the public relations effort provide appropriate means to celebrate the organization's collective experience and selfunderstanding within its larger cultural context? Do the organization's special events reflect the culture of the organizaiton and of society?

Notes

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2. Wells, Charlotte, "Harold Burson: Entrepreneur" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1982), p. 123.

3. Medhurst, Martin J., "Heroshima, Mon Amour: From Iconography to Rhetoric" Quarterly Journal of Speech 68(Nov. 1982):347.

4. Bartlett's Familiar Quotations

5. Medhurst, 347.

6. Sands, Kathleen M., "The Singing Tree: Dynamics of a Yaqui Myth" American Quarterly 34(Winter 1982):258.

7. Ibid, 361.

8. Campbell, Joseph, The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology. New York: Viking Press, Compass, 1964), p. 34.

9. Ibid.

10. Eliot, T. S., "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in Selected Essays new ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960), p. 7.

11. Rubin, Joan Shelley, "Constance Rourke in Context: The Uses of Myth" American Quarterly 28 (Winter 1976):587 citing:Warren Susman, ed., Culture and Commitment, 1925-1945 (New York: George Braziller, 1973), p. 19 and Richard H. Pell, Radical Visions and American Dreams (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p.315.

12. Ibid, 578.

13. Ibid, 581.

14. Smith, Henry Nash, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), preface.

15. McGuire, Michael, "Mythic Rhetoric in Mein Kampf: A Structuralist Critique" Quarterly Journal of Speech 63 (Feb. 1977): 2. See also Kenneth Burke, Literary Form, p. 6-7.

16. Ibid, 3.

17. Wilder, Amos, The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric (New York: Harper, 1946), p. 129.

18. Ward, Jean, "Interdisciplinary Research and Journalism Historians" Journalism History 5 (Spring 1978):19.

19. Gordon, George, Persuasion (New York: Hastings House, 1971), p. xii.

20. Levi-Strauss, Claude, Structural Anthropology (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1967), p. 25.

21. Kirk, G. S. The Nature of Greek Myth (New York: The Overlook Press, 1975), p. 20-21.

22. The author's unpublished paper, "Research of Corporate Culture: An Example of Mythic History from A.T.& T." traces the six elements of myth as they evolved in the American Telephone and Telegraph corporation.